CHRISTIAN DRAMA

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NOVEMBER 1950

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CHRISTIAN DRAMA

VOL. 1, NO. XIV OCTOBER 1950 ONE SHILLING

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ONE ACCORD

Reflections on the Chichester School

K. M. BAXTER

THERE are two things that remain to be said "after the party" at Chichester.

First, however, a word to those who could not be there. Those who haven't attended a Summer School will not glean much from the following pages. To them an apology is due. Yet either they will not read far, or if—being dogged—they do persist to the end, the clue to the meaning is in their own hands. They can begin to save now to come to next year's School at York, and see for themselves what it's all about. And here your editor feels bound to say that until you have attended a Summer School you can't really know what your Society is all about. For there are many societies, with libraries, and book lists, and magazines, and even annual general meetings; but it is something quite other than these amiable affairs which grows out of, or descends into, the R.D.S. Schools.

They begin with a certain tension. People (perhaps particularly those of our own Society) are a bit shy. Questions chase through the mind: "Shall I find hints for my parish plays here? Shall I like the Instructors? Will the Chaplains be any good? Is everyone overwhelmingly holy? Will the bath-water be hot? Can I stand the racket of communal living?" and so on. And this School was no different from others in this respect. But then, as the week settles down, and rehearsals begin, the special quality of these Schools begins to appear. All Drama Schools have rehearsals. All Religious Conferences have some sort of prayers. Yet the Schools of our Society (I speak from experience) are quite unlike the ordinary Drama School or the ordinary Conference week. Why? Because of what happens through the rehearsals. No one knows our debt to those who

conduct these rehearsals. And the instructors are unanimous in realizing their debt to the students. But the total effect of what happens is more than can be explained on any grounds of mere reciprocity of good feeling. In searching, as I did while at Chichester, for a mode of expression which would relate what happens to classical Christian experience, I was unable to avoid the words of the Whit Sunday Gospel: "They were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly . . . "

Yet "one accord" is an unusual phrase to apply to interdenominational Christian gatherings, or indeed to religious gatherings of any sort—it is difference, and not likeness, which usually emerges; and it needs no more than a careful reading of the two articles (Mr Jenkins and Mr Ward) in this issue to show how discussion, far from promoting accord, may widen the breach between theologian and artist, even where both sides are anxious for understanding. In the Chichester School, however—as indeed in all the Society's Schools—I have myself, no doubt that understanding grew. Why? Naturally, I can only seek the answer in my own experience; but there I can find only one reason: because, whatever the shortcomings (and they were many) of script, of instructor, of student, our work together involved us in prayer together. Our work did truly *become* prayer. We didn't so much pray about the play as pray the play. And we found when we did the public rehearsal that we were demanding the co-operation of prayer, not the passive watching of a play, from the audience (or congregation) too.

Rehearsals were tiring. The activity of praying one's work is not often attempted, and physical and spiritual muscles ached with equal intensity. But I, personally, came away with a conviction clinched that had been growing through the year: the certainty, namely, that there can be such a thing as a praying theatre. And, in considering further what is the special purpose for which these Schools should exist, I still could not get away from the Pentecostal imagery. As I see it, there is one valid reason for doing religious drama, or holding a Religious Drama School. There are plenty of courses of instruction in the Faith to attend, plenty of books to buy or borrow and read, plenty of sermons to hear, and plenty of churches in which to worship: but we are Christian people with a love of the drama; and the sole valid reason for our assembly is to test whether in fact our love of the drama is a means of opening souls to the operation of grace.

It seemed to me that Chichester gave the answer Yes. And going on from that affirmation to consider what sort of drama is most helpful, there are three qualities which seem likely to promote this end: the play studied should (a) involve the company in prayer together; (b) have a direct and recognizable relation to the life of both actors and audience; and (c) be written, rehearsed, and played in awareness of the Church Invisible. These three factors promote singleheartedness in a group, for they increase understanding without giving rise to argument. In these Schools it is not, after all, a question of what *we* want to say to each other—it is a question of how we can best learn to listen to the utterance of the Spirit. This once grasped, all the discussions about "simple" and "clever" become

irrelevant, for the Spirit's utterance will be to each in his own language. On this basis, then, any play which in rehearsal proves to promote *listening* is a play worth doing. And provided writer, producer and actor bring some sincerity, some humility, and total willingness to pool private experience (you have to "give yourself away" to act in religious drama)—why then any play, simple or clever, may become a channel of grace, and in a real sense a "prayer meeting".

If we could experience more frequently this meeting, could we not expect the tongues of fire? Ought we not to seize upon every occasion of such experience? Could Pentecost have happened (I speak as a fool) to scattered individuals deprived of fellowship? And given that fellowship, did their differences in *all* other respects matter one jot to the Fusing Power that descended upon them?

Well, that is the first of the two things which it seems fitting to say about Chichester 1950. The second is a more mundane one. It is this. The average age of the Schools is perhaps a shade too high. We need to keep the level fairly young if we are to be serving the new generation. But the new generation hasn't much cash, and it is for this reason that the memorial proposed for Jim Bartholomew is to take the form of Bursaries to the Schools. The Executive Committee would be very glad to hear from any members or groups who feel that their experience of these schools is one younger people should share, and who would be willing and able to offer financial help, large or small, to the Bursary Fund.

MRS GRANVILLE STREATFEILD

The death of Mrs Granville Streatfeild brings back to the older members of R.D.S. memories of the first Schools of Religious Drama.

Her charm and her ready wit made her lectures, on props and costume, sheer joy. She had a gift for making hard work seem like a gay adventure. But she was intensely practical. Church players cannot afford to spend lavishly on their productions, and she taught us the art of making something out of nothing.

I am sure there are many of her old pupils who have blessed her, as I have done, and carried on from strength to strength on the foundation she built for us.

I had special opportunities of learning from her because whenever she lectured to R.D.S. I waited on her, packing and unpacking props and handling the beautifully dyed things she brought to show us. When she became too busy with other work and it fell to my lot to be props and costume lecturer at R.D.S. Schools, I always felt how hard she was to follow.

Her name should be remembered as one of the people who set a high standard of visual beauty in the production of Religious plays.

H.T.

THE THEOLOGIAN AND THE ARTIST

A Lecture delivered at the Chichester School

By Rev. Daniel Jenkins

On the whole, the artist has had a better press than the theologian in the modern world. Ever since Milton decided to write *Paradise Lost* as "a poem doctrinal to a nation" instead of writing divinity and preaching sermons, the self-conscious English public has been more disposed even to be preached at by its artists than by its theologians. "Poets", said Shelley in one of the more windy passages of English anthology literature, "are the unacknowledged legislators of the world", and since his day they have had enough acknowledgement to convince quite a number of people that there might be something in what he said.

The proof of this is that, from the Romantic Movement onward, artists have been able to get away with being "personalities" in a way denied to other men, and certainly to theologians. The artist was allowed, and indeed expected, to dress differently, to speak differently and to act differently from his fellows. It is only now, with Mr Eliot in his business suit and all the rest working regular hours for the B.B.C., that the artist shows signs again of being, like Shakespeare and Bach, a normal member of society. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century the artist had an extraneous function to perform in society which has made it very difficult either for himself or for anyone else to think sensibly about his vocation. Either he was regarded as a substitute for the theologian—the bearer of a new revelation, like Richard Wagner, or the creative and fearless pioneer of thought like that more entertaining Edwardian Dr Joad, George Bernard Shaw—or else he was regarded as the compensatory figure, to use a psychological term, of a commercial, bourgeoise civilization. The Victorian business man, and his wife, wanted the artist to be as different from themselves as possible—so if he wore a bow tie, lived in sin, was improvident about money and did not keep appointments, well it was all due to that wonderful thing, "the artistic temperament", which she, or her husband, had no excuse for having, since they were simply honest people who were making money.

The result has been, as I have indicated, that sober thinking about the artist in relation to the rest of society has been very difficult to come by. And it has affected the theologian's attitude towards the artist as much as it has anyone else's. Either he has not been particularly interested in the artist, or else, he has shown an exaggerated regard for the artist and displayed a certain sense of inferiority in his presence. Even to-day, when relations between theologians and artists are better than they have been for a long time, this ambivalence is still frequently present. Theologians are still inclined, on the one hand, to assert with a certain truculence that they alone have the key to truth and that any contribution the artist has to make is irrelevant or else, on the other, they pay exaggerated deference to the artist and almost assume that any theological presentation offered by T. S. Eliot or Dorothy Sayers is verbally inspired.

I do not pretend to be able to define adequately the right relationship between the theologian and the artist. I doubt whether even a really competent person could do so in the present confused situation. But perhaps I can try to make one or two observations which may help to clear away some of the awkwardness and self-consciousness which be-fog the discussion. And the chief observation I want to make is the very simple and very trite one that the theologian is not the artist and the artist not the theologian. If each understands how he differs from the other, then there need be no conflict between them.

The artist's characteristic temptation is to believe that he can supersede the theologian. Here, of course, I speak of the serious creative artist with a strong sense of vocation to his work. There are plenty who cherish no such illusion. Natural egotism and the eager public cult which builds him up as a kind of oracle conspire to encourage him in the notion that he has a peculiar insight into the nature of truth which cannot be submitted to the same canons of judgement as the rest of human experience. Just because he is what he is, it stands to reason that the word of Shelley or D. H. Lawrence or Wordsworth or Jean-Paul Sartre carries more inherent authority than the word of a man in a dog-collar. What the man in the dog-collar says isn't evidence when you try to understand the meaning of life but what writers like these say must be taken into account with the utmost solemnity. The true artist must fight constantly, as those I have mentioned, apart perhaps from Wordsworth, did not, against such an attitude towards his work. He must insist constantly that he is not a theologian and that it is dangerously misleading to take him for one. He will also appeal to the theologian, part of whose business it is, to help safeguard him against the dangers of being mistaken for a theologian.

The theologian in his turn will realize that he has a very clear obligation towards the artist. He has, of course, the general duty of giving the artist a background of Christian understanding for his work as he has for all men, but along with that he has a special duty. He must protect the artist's freedom to be himself. That means both that he has the critical task in relation to the artist of exposing any pretensions he may make to using his art as a form of theology and also the critical task in relation to himself of avoiding drawing up specifications which he himself has devised for the artist's performance of his own job. If the artist cannot dictate to the theologian neither can the theologian dictate to the artist.

Now let me elaborate this a little. The theologian is a man very definitely under orders. His commission is given to him from Another and his task is a clearly-defined one. His subject matter is the Word of God, spoken in Jesus Christ as the Scriptures declare Him and as the Church throughout the ages has known Him. He has to proclaim that Word in such a way that it genuinely meets the condition of men as they live their lives out before God here and now and in such a way also that he and his hearers can be confident that it is the veritable Word of God in Jesus Christ and not a word of man masquerading as the Word of God. To perform this critical task, the theologian must possess a sensitivity as acute as that of the artist. He must be able to penetrate to the heart of a text. He must

feel and understand the situation in which men find themselves to-day, entering into all their doubts and difficulties so that God's Word can vindicate its reality anew in his own experience. But he is not primarily interested in himself and in his own reactions to things. He is the servant of the Church's service. As Karl Barth has finely said, he expresses "the Church's concentrated anxiety and concern about her own most intimate responsibility". He is the watchman on the Church's walls, the Lord's remembrancer among her people, and he must never allow his personal interests and preoccupations to distract him from his calling.

In the case of the artist, however, it is precisely his personal interests and preoccupations which he must express. He must be subjective in a sense which is quite improper to the theologian. Whatever may be said of self-expression as a rule of life, self-expression is the right and the necessity of the artist. This is not to say, of course, that he is free to do what he likes as he likes. He is under obedience to God and cannot find his true freedom apart from that obedience, any more than any other man can. His own integrity under God can often be the harshest of taskmasters. Nor does it mean that he can see himself as an isolated individual. The self he expresses lives in a community and stands in an artistic tradition and he may rightly see his work as the expression of the spirit of a community. I am not defending those who claim that the artist lives in a private world and that his thoughts need have only a private significance. Yet the creative artist must apprehend his theme with passionate subjectivity and he must put his personal stamp upon his expression of it. This is true even of the most objective work, the building of a Town Hall or the musical setting of the Mass, if it is the work of a genuine artist. Not only so, but he must, in a sense, be relatively indifferent to the wider implications of his work. His primary purpose must be, in the form appropriate to his particular branch of art, to sing, even though his song be only the cry of pain of Kirkegaard's swan.

The artist, therefore, should be grateful to the theologian for performing the burdensome duty of being the watchman on the walls and the Lord's remembrancer on his behalf, so that he can get along quietly with his singing. He is a foolish artist if, in the pursuit of his strictly artistic vocation, he tries to carry the theologian's burden for him. And the theologian in his turn, should be grateful for the artist's irresponsibility. The artist is not his yes-man. He sings of life as he sees it through his own eyes, and not through those of the theologian, although, it is to be hoped, with eyes illumined by the same light as that of which the theologian also speaks. The wise theologian will recognize that in so doing the artist may be able to teach him much about life and the world and occasionally something about the Word of God which would be impossible if he did not enjoy his own freedom as over against the theologian.

In pleading for this distinction between the theologian and the artist I do not want, of course, to be too much of a purist. A good theologian should certainly have something of the artist in him and a mature artist might very well have something of the temper and equipment of a theologian. Nevertheless, it is of the first importance that the distinction

should be borne in mind if dangerous confusion is to be avoided, especially when the person in question is both a theologian and an artist. Thus, most people would probably agree that Dante is an example of a poet who achieved the difficult task of writing a theological poem and that Schleiermacher is an example of a theologian who failed because, in a confused way, he tried to be an artist through his theological work. Whether Milton succeeded in being true both to the vocation of the theologian and of the artist in his poem "doctrinal to a nation", *Paradise Lost,* is a question which I must leave to be hotly debated by the critics. If a theologian can write like an artist, that is wonderful, always provided he keeps his artistic interest strictly subordinate to his theological. And if an artist can make his work full of theological insight, that also is wonderful, provided he remains first and last an artist. And if he can produce a work which is equally a work of art and a work of theology, or is first one and then the other, that is still more wonderful, always provided he is a sufficient saint and genius to keep his head and know exactly what he is doing at each particular moment.

All this seems to me to have a practical application to the work of a society like yours, and I should like to spend the rest of my time in trying to draw it out.

The first point is one which must have occurred to some of you already. It concerns the status of religious drama in the light of the considerations I have tried to put forward. Is it primarily a form of theological activity—a part of the teaching or proclaiming office of the Church—or a form of art? I imagine that most of you would say at once, and I think I should agree, that it is primarily a form of art. Certainly, its content is the Christian story, but the approach is artistic not theological. The form of conscience which governs it is that of the artist, not that of the theologian. From this it follows that those of you who are concerned that religious drama should hold its full place in the life of the Church will be very careful to make the right kind of claim for it.

You will beware of trying to make it any kind of substitute for the teaching and preaching office of the Church. Let it be agreed that it can be a useful supplement to these. It can present aspects of Christian truth in vivid, concrete form which will hold the attention and capture the imagination when more formal and rationalistic presentation of it will fail. And to produce and act a Christian play is, as you will all know better than I do, itself often a most valuable form of training in spiritual understanding. But, from a theologian's point of view, I should have to insist that all this does not go far enough. The Word of God must address a man in the most precise and systematic way he is capable of understanding and that needs the direct communication of straight speaking to his own condition, with untidy and inartistic repetition to make sure that he understands. Here I must confess to a certain Protestant dislike, which I know some Catholics would share, of speaking too easily of the Church's liturgy as a dramatic rendering of the Gospel. It certainly has that element, but unless it is strictly subordinate to edification, in the Pauline sense, to the building up of the body in real obedience to Christ in the

specific situation in which they find themselves it can obviously become a hindrance rather than a help. It can become play-acting in the unworthy and derogatory sense in a context where play-acting is least permissible, because here each soul must stand as itself in all its nakedness before the God who divineth the intents of the heart. And from the artistic point of view, it is a misuse of religious drama to make it merely the handmaid of the teaching and preaching office of the Church. Not that it is improper or dishonourable that it should sometimes be used in that way, but to see that as its chief justification is to stunt its development by limiting its legitimate freedom. Religious drama stands in its own right as a way in which those who have the gifts and calling for this form of activity offer the best that is in them to God, for their own delight and that of their fellows and for His glory. It does not need any further justification in the Church than that and it is unfair to it that it should be burdened with the responsibility of serving more than incidentally as a propaganda and educational agency to be conveniently used by the preaching and teaching offices in an age when they are finding the going rather hard.

The other point I should like to make is this. This clear differentiation of function has its lessons also for those who, in our day, have taken to writing religious drama. Anything I go on to say must be set against the background of the most sincere gratitude for their achievements. But I wonder whether a certain duality of purpose which is reflected in their plays has not adversely affected the quality of their work as artists. Frankly, I think they suffer from an excessive theological self-consciousness. Even in *The Cocktail Party,* for all its acceptance of the conventions of the up-to-date drawing room comedy, the preacher is, perhaps, too thinly disguised under the dramatist and the weakness is much more obvious among the lesser luminaries. Here be it noted that the ever-competent Miss Sayers is better than most of the rest.

Perhaps it is too much to expect our Christian dramatists to achieve more spontaneity at the present stage of the world's history. Our thinking and observation of life has departed from Christian ways for so long that our drama has to be much more overloaded with ideas and explanation and self-justification than might happen in a day of more confident and surely-grounded faith. As I say, we should be grateful that our Christian dramatists have been able to do so much in so short a time. But a clearer understanding of the relation between the theologian and the artist should help those of us who are theologians to assist the artists to be more fully themselves and not to rub our hands quite so gleefully when they manage to preach our sermons for us. The Christian Gospel is not merely one ideology among others. It is the declaration of the final truth about life. And in the long run we best serve the cause of that Gospel by letting the facts themselves speak their own message rather than by trimming them too neatly and too quickly to suit a pattern appropriate to another purpose than that for which we have been called.

This is the text of a talk broadcast by R. H. Ward in the Third Programme on June 16th, 1950.

CONFERENCE ON ART AT THE OECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

THIS was the first international conference on Art which had been held at the Oecumenical Institute, and no doubt it was something in the nature of an experiment. There were about thirty of us there, Europeans and Americans: artists of various kinds on the one hand, and on the other—I fear one has to put it like that—theologians, either clergy or University lecturers; though one or two had a foot in either camp, and must therefore, I think, have suffered considerable inward division. Mostly because of the tendency towards protestantism—about eighty per cent of those present were Lutherans or Reformed Churchmen—certain trends took charge of the conference from the first, while certain others were anathema from the first.

The conference was presided over by Professor Gerardus van der Leeuw, Professor of the History of Religion at the University of Groeningen, who opened the proceedings on the first evening. He referred in particular to the antagonism which often existed between the artist and the man of religion. It was clear, however, that artists and Christians had one thing in common: a certain absolutism which in either case laid claim to the whole man. It was this fundamental similarity between them which kept the antagonism alive, and at the same time made it the more regrettable. Meanwhile, the artist saw the truth in terms of beauty, the Christian in terms of goodness; and while the Church claimed to be God's messenger to the world, the artist felt that he belonged to a kind of Church of his own, and looked for a Kingdom which he was under the necessity of preaching. The chief question the conference ought to decide was whether these two kinds of men were to remain enemies or to become friends.

In fact, it didn't decide it; or so it seemed to me. The question *is* a fundamental one, and a real meeting ground for these "two kinds of men" was never found. The old meeting-ground, a common belief, has for some centuries been vanishing from beneath their feet; and a new relationship, which the distresses of our times seem to call for, is now far easier to talk about than to accomplish: as the discussions at this conference—and I shall say something about them presently—demonstrated very clearly.

Dr R. A. Schroeder, the German poet, was the first lecturer. He spoke of "the issues involved in the conflict between art as a commission or engagement and art as free self-expression". He referred to the contemporary discussions, in France and elsewhere, of the question whether art and literature should be *libre* or *engagé*, and found the source of this discussion in the eighteenth century, when, principally in Germany, "aesthetics" had its origins as a self-consistent aspect of human thought. He pointed out that the conception of "pure aesthetics" was not known in

Greek or Roman times or in the middle ages, when the artist was generally considered as a craftsman like any other. When we came to look closely at the modern conception of "free" aesthetics and "free" art, we were brought to the conclusion that these were a sort of platonic "Idea", and that it was necessary to say that they were both existent and non-existent: existent as a principle of thought and imagination, as a postulate; but non-existent as a principle of practical life and work. For the work of classical and medieval artists was indisputably *engagé*. Homer sang for the chieftains who gave him bread, nor certainly was Shakespeare free in this sense; all artists of the past had been bound by necessities of material, convention, popular prejudice, time, place, and so on. Then was the whole question of art as either *libre* or *engagé* therefore nonsense? No, because of the double sense in which "free aesthetics" was both existent and non-existent. Nothing could be freer than the music of Homer's verse, than Shakespeare's creative treatment of his material. "Pure Aesthetics" and pure "freedom of art" might be platonic "Ideas", but, just as light brought with it its inevitable shadow, so these ideas, when they reached the world of practical affairs, also brought their inevitable shadow; and that shadow was "responsibility", which became synonymous with *engagement*. What, then, was the hidden point at which the freedom and the bondage of art—or freedom and Law, as Goethe called it—became one? It seemed to Dr Schroeder to be somewhat paradoxically enshrined in the name Symbolism, the last ditch of "pure aesthetics" or "art for art's sake", for the Greek word *symbolon*, meaning the two parts of a staff or tablet which fitted together exactly and thus constituted a token of recognition, stood for the meeting of freedom and responsibility as the related parts of the whole which was art.

The subject of the Swedish delegate Olov Hartmann, clergyman and writer, was "the problem of the relation between Christianity and art, with special reference to the more recent period". He began by speaking of liturgical art as an interpretative agent for the Word of God, and of the tension between the responsibility imposed upon the artist by the Word and the artist's own desire to be free both in inspiration and in execution. But he quoted Berdyaev's dictum, that "the artist is a creator after the likeness of God", and passed to a consideration of Mallarmé and Valéry, condemning them as "idolators of the beautiful". The question, he said, was to defend the autonomy of art from the kind of heresy involved in the Valérian conception of the Trinity, and in the Symbolist conception of art as a law unto itself. André Gide was certainly right in saying that "no work of art can be created without demonic influence". Even the highest sphere in which man thought to find subjects for religious art was in fact that sphere in which shines the star named Lucifer. Rossetti's Blessed Damozel might be leaning on the gold bar of heaven, but she was quite as non-Christian as Zola's Nana or Manet's painting of her. Hedged about as he was by demonic forces, how was the artist to speak of the realities of life without in fact becoming a menace to life? For the artist, as Mauriac had said, "does not observe life, he creates it", and we could not know what dangers might not be inherent in the dynamic and vital self-existence

of a work of art: Tolstoy had felt that *The Kreutzer Sonata* had been turned to devilish purposes and made the excuse for the commission of the very sins it condemned. Mauriac had pointed out also that, while the spring, the artist himself, might be purified, there was still left at the bottom of it "the mud in which my writerhood has its secret roots"; and in fact there was nothing in this world which had not its roots there. This it was often art's function to demonstrate; and certainly there must be no suggestion of trying to cloud art's ability to see these things clearly; evil was everywhere, and there was as much of the devil in the multiplication-table as in a play of Strindberg's. The Bible itself presented us with a host of figures, immoral as well as moral, and the Bible was God's Word. This admission of the evil in it was only understandable when we knew that Christ himself had come down from heaven into this evil, and had thought it no robbery to be at once equal with God and a servant of men. This, then, was the example art must look to; art too must be content always to make the downward movement; if it was to serve God, it must serve its neighbour, and do so from *below* the problems of the human condition, not from *above* them. Art must have no ivory towers; its call was to probe the depths of humanity. Director Hartmann now set against the Blessed Damozel and Nana van Gogh's painting *Sorrow,* and the figure of Mouchette in *La Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette* by Bernanos, and pointed out that the true artist always spoke *to* men, even when he was not speaking *of* them: Beethoven wrote at the head of the Kyrie in his Missa Solemnis the words, "From the heart—May it return—to the heart again". Meanwhile, this sense of a shared humanity could equally well be present in pagan and secular art. It could not be claimed that van Gogh was a believing Christian, but was Christianity in any way compromised by van Gogh's compassion for human suffering? The good Samaritan was not a Christian, either, but Jesus had said, "Do thou likewise".

The third lecture was given by the President, Professor van der Leeuw, who considered certain "responses to the reality of the present cultural crisis in the various fields of art". He spoke in a general way of the artist's attitude to life and the world in which he lives, and of the differences between these and his own inward world and imaginative life, which made of the work of art he produced a magical evocation of a "something" not ordinarily perceived. All styles, of all periods, were to be found in the painting and literature of our time, which was one without a *Weltanschauung*. This art, however, apparently had certain predilections, notably that for the corrupt, expressed, for instance, in the novels of Huxley or Sartre. There was almost no evidence of true piety in this art, but it did clearly possess a certain religious sense of an existential kind. What it wanted to show was man stripped naked, man self-existent, man as "nothing but *this man*". Thus the contemporary artist's achievement was at least a harsh and severe honesty. But the logical conclusion of his attitude was dangerous in a twofold sense: first, in the attempt to become God, to become one's own creator; and then, in the attempt to destroy creation as a whole, to break it down into its primitive and chaotic elements. Seeking the cause of this condition of

art the lecturer found it in the contemporary denial of the value of myth. He thought the only place in which myth was still a living reality was the Christian Church: take away its myth from Christianity and little enough would be left; and yet it was the Church which most sturdily denied the value of myth. Meanwhile, the fact remained that the artist went to the same sources for his creation as God had gone to for His; here the artist was certainly in danger of sharing the *hubris* of Lucifer, but his safeguard and salvation lay in the second creation, in the Incarnation: when God made Himself man, he made Himself an artist. Every true work of art, whether or no it was overtly Christian, was *an unknown*, rooted in a mythological mystery.

Perhaps I should say at this point that the discussion following this lecture—though it was as diffuse as all the discussions at this conference—tended to clarify for the first time the issue, not to say the breach, between the artistic and the theological elements among the delegates. Their ideological differences had been deepening with each session. A calvinistic tendency on the part of the theologians to assert that all art, indeed all beauty, must be the work of the devil exasperated even those artists who belonged to similar denominations; while the artists' demand for creative autonomy seemed dangerous, to say the least, to the theologians. Now a French painter, a Lutheran, rose to plead passionately for an element of solid reality and practical sense to be brought into these lectures and discussions. He reminded the conference that to-day the artist has no longer a place in society, and that this was surely the real issue in a conference about the relations of art, religion and the social order. He pointed out that the artist—and one such was known to him—may have nowadays to work in the slaughter-houses during the week in order to be able to afford to paint on Sundays. Theoretical talk of God and the devil was not the way, he felt, to deal with the real problem, which was this: if things continued in their present state, the artist as such would very soon disappear, and works of art with him. If it concerned them at all, what had the Churchmen to say to this? From this point onward the conference began to be a little more clearly aware of the mutual responsibility towards each other, if only as human beings, of artists and men of religion, and a certain amount was said on both sides about the need for the Church to accept its own past and present culpability towards the arts.

The last lecture, by M. Denis de Rougemont, seemed to go a little distance towards closing the gap between the two parties, or at least towards summarizing their difficulties. His subject was "the mission of art as a creative expression of the human spirit". Art with a capital A could properly have no mission, M. de Rougemont said, since it was no more than a generic term or a romantic exaggeration; only a man could have a mission. What, then, were the nature and aim of the activities of painters, writers, sculptors and so on? What in fact was the difference between the making of poems and symphonies and the making of machines, chemical products or laws? The work of art differed from the other works of man in its very *raison d'être*, for this was, to *signify*, to bear a meaning, and in doing so to lay a trap for the meditations of other men,

to give them form and to lead them towards a reality transcending them. One could no longer say that "to create beauty" was the aim of the artist of our time; and in any case "beauty" was not a conception to be found in the Bible. Beauty, however, could be expressed in such other things as order, freedom, truth and love, and the mission of the artist was to give meaning, in these senses, to the world and to our life in it. The artist fulfilled his mission, first, by so much as he made himself a good workman and master of his materials and techniques; then, by so much as his work liberated, ordered and exposed truth and reality for others. True criticism, therefore, should be concerned on the one hand with the artist's use of his means, and on the other with the nature of the realities he expressed by them. Meanwhile, the artist, when he composed a work, symbolically imitated the creative act of God the Father. And in doing so he both exposed and at the same time obscured reality by the material means he employed, and this was a symbolic parallel with the Incarnation of the Son. At the same time, the artist who received an inspiration and set to work did not know whether he obeyed a fantasy of his own subconscious mind or a vision of objective truth; and here was an example of the mysterious action of the Holy Ghost among men. "Thus", said M. de Rougemont, "it seems to me that a Christian's meditation upon the activity and the product of the artist may be deepened and instructed by a meditation upon the nature of the Trinity." He went on to equate artistic "deviations" with doctrinal heresies. Thus surrealism represented gnostic illuminism, certain kinds of romanticism certain kinds of manicheeism, abstract art a sort of docetism. He wondered whether theological criticism of the arts should not properly set itself up on that basis, and so restore critical criteria and a common terminology. Meanwhile, however, the function of art remained the broadening of the human being's perceptions of reality and order, and of the sense of his own destiny.

The conference would have achieved more, I felt, if there had been some attempt at chairmanship, at directing the discussions, even in informal sessions, along the lines laid down by the lecturers, lines which were often very suggestive and important. Artists are liable to be self-opinionated, theologians are liable to be—dogmatic. It was very seldom indeed that either touched those points at which art and religion really meet and fuse; that is to say, we lacked the human touch, and we lacked imagination, the conditions in which both personal opinion and dogmatic habit can be transcended. Face to face, the godly appeared to be fascinated and paralysed by their fear of the devil, the artistic by—I suppose—their fear of God. As one of the artists, I came away somewhat relieved to find that I was of the devil's party, and knew it. I can only imagine that the theologians returned with a comparable relief to the odour of sanctity. As to our mutual relations, at least they can't have broken down completely; for I understand there will probably be further conferences on less ideological and more practical lines.

THE NATIVITY PLAY AND ITS MUSIC

by JESSIE POWELL

ONCE upon a time there was an R.D.S. School Student who made Mr Christopher le Fleming gasp by demanding "Nativity plays of the right length not needing to be padded out with carols." He was probably not unique, so it may be as well to say at once that this article is concerned only with music which is an integral part of the play, intensifying its drama or enhancing its atmosphere.

Assuming, with Miss Sayer's Lord Peter Wimsey, that "when you know *how* you know *who*," let us set down our particular portmanteau "how," which includes the specific points and the possible types.

Nativity plays (apart from the "carol-mime") need music in three sorts of places:—action; procession; entr'acte.

Mary's lullaby to the Child is the obvious example in the first section; we could often increase the use of this type of music with advantage. Have we not sometimes thought that a couple of pages of Shepherds' dialogue about how cold the night, how bright the stars, and how still everything, could with advantage be replaced by one of them playing just the right air on a pipe?

That brings us to the first of our "Who's," and the difference between the seen and the unseen musician. Our seen performer being used, as here, in the action of the play, need be no better a player than the character he is impersonating. This lets in many amateurs who, though incapable of getting into the Hallé, can play a pipe as well as a Palestinian shepherd could.

It is not necessary for the piper to be one of the speaking Shepherds: indeed, his introduction as an extra offers alternative opportunities for drama. Does he see and hear the Angels or not? If our play stresses the fact that the Incarnation was offered to all but apprehended only by some, then our piper—sitting apart—goes to sleep after he has played his *Abendlied* and does not wake up until the manifestation is over. If, on the other hand, importance is laid on the Shepherds' gifts, then our piper reacts with the rest, goes to Bethlehem and offers—no, *not* his pipe, but its music. And could this not be linked with the lullaby? Suppose his tune be *This Endris Night* (O.B.C. 39): he plays it once, begins a second verse, on the second line Mary begins to sing (this, to relieve her from calling herself "this lovely lady"), he then soars into the *Fa-Burden.*

Angels (dramatically as well as theologically) offer us more scope than we habitually accept. Not only those of us who heard Mr Christopher Casson's magic at this year's School, but all who have heard Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, know that no instrument suggests the sweep and beat of angelic wings better than harp *arpeggios.* If we fail to find a local

harpist, we may use (with due deference to Mr le Fleming's comments on Elgar) a recorded introduction of the "Praise to the Holiest" chorus.

Though the best, the harp is not the only possibility: two or three violins playing *pizzicato arpeggios* give a fine effect. But beware: harpists and violinists are unseen performers, and the standard of execution has gone up. Our choice of the live in preference to the recorded is for its added warmth and flexibility; the quality of playing must be as good.

If we give a Nativity play every year, do let us use different settings, especially of the *Gloria*—and even, once in five years, have it spoken chorally instead of sung: we have Scriptural authority.

Section II includes not only processionals of the Pomp and Circumstance variety, but music for any entrance for which it is an advantage. In church and many hall productions we carelessly think this means *all* entrances: I shall return to this later. Obviously this section overlaps the "entr'acte" and—less obviously—the "action" section. For instance, if we use a non-speaking shepherd piper, we can bring him in on the light-change after the preceding scene, and he plays the rest of the Shepherds in. And here, a production plea quite disjoint from music is wrung from me: in "open" (*i.e.* without curtains) production, *do* let us bring in our people and make our few (oh, *very few*) changes naturally and honestly, in a dimmed light if we will, but not stumbling about in the black-out in a completely unrighteous and distracting fashion.

After which *cri du coeur* we immediately see another opportunity: our Shepherds leave the Child, going back to their sheep in adoring dedication, to the pipe music of the beginning (but now played unseen), combined with the Angels' *arpeggios*.

Our music for all Mary's entrances and exits should be neither heavily solemn nor prettily sentimental, but have a backbone of strength as well as a texture of radiant joy. The Bach *Sinfonia* has already been suggested (C. le F's pamphlet); the *Angelus ad Virginem* (O.B.C. 52) is another lovely example, simpler and suitable for younger people.

Our Kings' procession can be what we make it, within the intention of our play. Youth Groups are often wise to build up the splendour and pageantry of this entrance, emphasizing the contrast with the quiet shabby place of the King of Kings.

There are many more places for the Kings to come from besides Orien Tar, and a less hackneyed choice of music gives greater opportunities. What about *Personent Hodie* (O.B.C. 78), sung by three or four men *in Latin* (the Magi came from afar), with the strong rhythm picked up here and there by percussion—tambourine (the Bible's timbrel), cymbals, and we may be able to borrow an African drum which raises and lowers its pitch with the pressure of the player's arm on its connecting strings.

Why should some of the musicians not be ritual dancers? It does not need a Sadler's Wells choreographer to arrange an effective processional dance using steps forward, steps back, and turns, sometimes with and sometimes against the beat of the music.

All this is not just to introduce exciting noise and movement—though this can be a good thing on over-pious occasions. If our play includes a

scene at the Court of King Herod, we shall have two Magi's entrances. In the first, to Herod, we shall take our pomp and circumstance right up to his throne; in the second (or if there is only this), to the Child, the Kings will silence and dismiss their retinues as they come nearer to Him, finishing their journey in adoring silence.

In all our plans for music, let us be alert for such right uses of silence. Another is in the Innyard scene: the cries and bustle and laughter gradually cease as first one and then another catches sight of Joseph helping Mary towards them through the auditorium; they could walk several yards in complete silence.

Entr'acte music (including, of course, the introduction), apart from the outgoing and incoming processionals, really serves to bridge the mood from one scene to the next: never merely padding of time or cover for scene shifting. We must be prepared to follow up all Mr le Fleming's enthralling clues. Pure entr'acte music should be supplied as unobtrusively as possible. Singers may be in a gallery but players who saw with their bows are better right out of sight.

We shall not make the same mistake as an otherwise intelligent group who used nineteenth century four-part harmony in the *Coventry* Nativity. Medieval plays demand music which, if not strictly medieval in date, is polyphonic in style and austere in arrangement: the full symphony orchestra and five manuals are as unsuitable as the jazz band.

Our call, then, is to wider adventure consonant with the *genre* of our play—and there shall be, on the very bells of the horses, "Holiness unto the Lord."

OBERAMMERGAU. JUNE 1950

Some Impressions

From Carina Robins

It is a Monday afternoon in June, and I am sitting in a meadow of wild flowers on the hillside overlooking Oberammergau. The little town lies in the midst of the plain, with mountain ranges enfolding it on every side. At one end the cupola of the Church rises high over all, and what beautiful deep mellow bells it has, while at the other end I have a clear view of the Passion Play Theatre with its vast auditorium opening to the sky. I saw the play yesterday, and already it is being performed once more, for every now and then I can hear strains of music or shouts of the crowd floating up the valley.

The Oberammergauers are a tough breed, full of character and integrity, who have surmounted untold obstacles through the centuries and endured colossal hardships through wars, plague, fires, famine and

again wars, and always they have come through as a united little community, determined beyond all else to keep their vow made to God in 1633—that they would devote one year in ten to preparing a presentation of Our Lord's Passion.

Countless reports have already been written, so I will only give a few of my impressions at random. I expected much and was not disappointed. I had been warned that the action was slow and the seats hard, and so these things did not bother me.

What impressed me most was the quiet dignity of the entire performance. Here was the stupendous Drama of the Passion being performed in fulfilment of a Vow by the whole population—for every true-born Oberammergauer takes part by right and by desire. No need to preach and exhort, but rather to present the Story as given in the Bible with the least possible adornment or theatrical "effects" and with unshakeable faith in its truth. Thus the ritual unfolded stage by stage in true Catholic fashion yet with little or no "Roman" additions.

The auditorium seating 5,500 people is finely constructed to give everyone a clear view of the play. There is a vast fore-stage of magnificent design open to the sky with Pilate's house and Annas' house on either side in Medieval tradition; streets leading up stage but no longer giving an open view of the mountains, though these can still be seen over the top of the street walls; and then comes the great inner stage where the tableaux and many of the major scenes take place. This has a glass roof which is darkened for the Crucifixion Scene. Rain had fallen in torrents early on Sunday morning and only ceased just before the play began, but the sky remained dark till the afternoon, and seated far back as I was, it was sometimes difficult to see details clearly on this inner stage, though when the sun broke through there were some wonderful effects of light and shadow.

It is surely false to think of this play as the effort of a peasant village, for though they are mostly farmers or wood-carvers by profession, they have been influenced by the great monastery at Ettal, only half an hour away, through many centuries, and through this monastery they have been in contact with all Europe and benefited by a good portion of its culture. Georg Lang is a most capable producer and his stage-management is superb.

The Chorus, entering from right and left in Greek tradition, walked with quiet dignity and were beautifully dressed in stylized white robes with blue-grey cloaks, giving a sculptured effect. Their singing and the orchestral accompaniment were satisfying, and Alois Lang was a powerful Prologue.

With the exception of the chorus the play is dressed in strictly historical Palestinian costume with great care taken over correct detail and little thought of colour design. The result is a glorious kaleidoscopic effect in the crowd scenes but it is hard from a distance to distinguish the important characters. It was even quite difficult at moments to find Our Lord amongst the crowd. He was wearing a deep cream robe with a wine coloured toga, and he did not stand out nearly as easily as Pilate in white

or Caiaphas with his tall head-dress. I wondered at the producer's intentions here, more especially when he failed to isolate Christ and His Mother in one of the most moving moments of the play when He is saying farewell to her at Bethany. Then again, why did the producer let the crowd or the Apostles continue their natural little movements at dramatic moments when one longed for complete stillness to emphasize the central action? One thing became clear, and that was that he knew what he was doing, whether one agreed or not, and was consistent throughout. Was it his intention that we should realize the essential humanity of Our Lord, and how ordinary much of His life must have seemed?

The acting was on a high level with clear characterization, the crowd work excellent (and at times I believe there were over six hundred on the stage at once) the team-work good and there was a selfless impersonal quality in the acting. Toni Preisinger plays the Christus with dignity and sincerity. Though not a great performance, his has moments of greatness and he sustains the part with majesty right to the end. It must be a great test of endurance. His washing of the disciples' feet, and then the distribution of the Bread and Wine at the Last Supper were some of the outstanding moments of the day. He has a rather hard voice, but his diction and that of the whole cast was excellent. Our Lady plays her Gospel part in the Story and no more, and this she did beautifully, though it seemed a mistake to choose so young a girl. St John was rather disappointing; the long lank hair gave a weak appearance and I did not get the sense of devotion to his Master. I was impressed by the restraint in the playing of Mary Magdalene and Judas, for often I have seen plays ruined by emotional over-playing of these characters.

The Crucifixion Scene is quite wonderfully performed and defies description. I shall never forget the Deposition, and the strong tender loving care of Joseph of Arimathea.

The Resurrection is given in two very swift scenes. I was amazed at the restraint here and the "ordinary" quality! The Angel of the Resurrection was disappointing, and we would have welcomed a suggestion of artificial light here and on the Risen Christ, but this is not allowed, and true it is that one appreciated the absence of any sense of magic. One felt that the players believed in the Resurrection as Fact, and expected one to share in their belief.

Considering the play as a whole I would say that what we witnessed was not an inspired performance as I imagine it to have been in the days of Joseph Mayr and Anton Lang. Emotions were not greatly stirred and we were not moved to weep but rather to think. This surely is in keeping with the present age, and one hopes that the play will be accepted by its hard-bitten audience *because* of this restraint.

FEBRUARY

A week-end of prayer will be held at St Ursula's House, Chiswick, 23-25 February, 1951, to which members of R.D.S. are invited. Full particulars from R.D.S. office.

WIGS ON THE GREEN

Letters addressed to the Editor, which should promote further discussion

DEAR EDITOR,

I am an old lady now and therefore, admittedly, out of touch with much of the modern art—whether music, painting, or sculpture. But I happen to have been brought up in an artistic atmosphere—one brother a painter of considerable repute in his day, and another a sculptor—and for twenty years I lived among artists and writers, including Sargeant, Steer, MacColl, Tonks, and so on. Therefore I dare to accept your challenge in the last *Christian Drama* magazine and criticize its new cover.

Frankly, I dislike it intensely — ! It seems to me grotesque, without that obvious searching for truth which the old grotesque Egyptian drawings, and even early Italian ones, reveal.

I wholly agree with your dread of anything sentimental in the portraying of Our Lord—but surely there are many stages between the "pretty-pretty" and this conception?

It seems to me lacking in form and expression—neither royal, nor spiritual, nor commanding—but just a conventional caricature. Even Comedy and Tragedy need an explanatory note beneath them, for both express the same sort of ugliness with no redeeming merit! Our Christian Faith is founded on the greatest Drama ever played, and it seems to me essential that if there is to be any drawing of Christ on the cover, it should portray something of His beauty, royalty, and power, which would at once attract and inspire interest and reverence—otherwise have a wholly different plan and leave Him out.

Forgive—if you can!—this blatant criticism and believe me to be a very keen member of your Society, with a great desire that your Magazine should attract many more readers—but, to my mind, this cover will not help to that end.

Yours sincerely,

ANON.

Open letter to the Reverend Hugh Ross-Williamson.

DEAR HUGH ROSS-WILLIAMSON,

Why may not Christian drama mean exactly what it says—Christian drama? That is, plays written and performed about some aspect of Christian doctrine; the treatment may be direct or indirect as in *Everyman* or in *The Cocktail Party*. The performance of such plays may, also, be an act of worship—but then so may be the boiling of an egg or the hoeing of turnips. So much the better; provided always that the act of worship keeps its proper place and is not allowed to interfere with the technicalities of egg boiling, turnip hoeing, or play acting. But that is just the crux. As Charles Williams says in *Judgement at Chelmsford*: "If piety can't act,

Father, piety should not be in a play." Your contention that only Christians should play in Christian drama seems, from my experience at least, to be mistaken.

I have known more than one case of agnostics and of atheists who were able to apprehend and convey Christian ideas in a play, with far more depth than their Christian colleagues. This should not be surprising, for, within his range, it is an actor's business to understand and convey many characters other than his own. Besides, if only Christians may play Christians, who, in the Parish, are we to cast for King Herod and Judas Iscariot? (In point of fact we often find an inoffensive curate playing these parts because nobody else wants them!) Your contention might, I fear, lead to the best parts being cast not to the most suitable actors and actresses, but handed out as good-conduct prizes. But the Spirit blows where It likes; It may—and sometimes does—blow upon the non-Christian playing a Christian part, for his conversion or for the conversion of some who watch him. This point is forcibly made by Henri Ghéon in his Foreword to *The Comedian*; the play itself deals with this subject.

Although, academically, one might argue for or against, in practice, I believe it is very desirable, probably essential, that the Author and the Director of Christian plays should believe. If the Director is not a believer, the production is likely to err on the side of over-devoutness and so lose its effectiveness. Christians and non-Christians seem equally prone to act Christian drama in a special "releegious" voice. Not long ago I saw a professional production of a Christian play which was technically pretty sound; it was all rather beautiful, rather unreal, and played throughout in a minor key. This was not the fault of the artistes who were, I believe, capable of something much better. But I gathered that they had been told at rehearsal that the play was of a Highly Spiritual nature—with disastrous results. Most English education trains us to use two "special" voices: one for religion, the other for sex. The natural voice in which we may speak with enthusiasm about bacon and eggs or a Mozart Concerto is not, as a rule, used for those two subjects. In producing Christian drama, the producer (without minimizing the spiritual crisis of the play) often has to fight for true speech and rid the cast of pseudo-reverence. A few years ago a Company of mixed Christians and non-Christians were rehearsing a Nativity play in Bible words. Some very long speeches fell to a certain "old pro". After a few rehearsals he admitted that he had never read (or heard) the Bible, but he added "this is *fine* stuff for an actor to speak". The result was that he brought the words to life, and, by example, helped to rid the whole production of "Parsonic Voice".

You imply a dichotomy between sincere acting and technical acting. This antithesis is, I believe, a dangerous one to the whole religious drama movement, analogous to the distinction between religion based on the heart and dogmatic or theological religion. Both approaches are (I believe) to be desired, in both cases; it is surely as wrong to lay stress on sincerity without the technical framework, as to encourage emotion in religion without theological form. Most professional producers are bombarded by

young ladies who "simply know they can act, because they can shed real tears on the stage." The heartless director points out to the young hopefuls that the more *they* feel on the stage the less the *audience* will feel, and although this rule may not entirely hold good in religious drama (due to various spiritual and psychological forces at work) it should be borne in mind.

Because of the great admiration I have for your writings (dating back to your Broadcast play on Gladstone) it is a surprise to find myself in opposition to much that you wrote in Christian Drama. Whether or not other readers will agree with these reflections I do not know, but such important points have been raised in your article that it will be stimulating if this leads to further letters and discussion.

Yours sincerely,

RUTH SPALDING.

General Manager.

The Rock Theatre Company Limited.
(Incorporating the Oxford Pilgrim Players.)

FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

During May and June 1951 the Religious Drama Society is arranging, in conjunction with the churches concerned, the following events in the London area:—

In St John's, Waterloo Road (the rebuilt Festival Church) a new play by Christopher Fry, produced by Michael Macowan. This play will subsequently tour churches in the Provinces.

In Southwark Cathedral, a new play by K. M. Baxter with music by Christopher Le Fleming, produced by Doreen Woodcock.

In St Thomas's, Regent Street, a play by Richard Ward, produced by Pamela Keily with an amateur cast from Sheffield. This play may also be performed in Poplar.

NEWS OF THE OTHERS

STAR TURN

Nuremburg. Pastor Hellinger writes: —

The translation of Miss Joyce Biddell's *Gates of Hell* into German could not be a literal one, as the message the play brings so powerfully home to the audience aims at a concrete situation, which naturally varies in various countries. Therefore certain adaptations in the scenes of the congregation at home and the one on the mission-field were unavoidable. But it was attempted to retain the gist of those scenes very faithfully, and the composition of the play remained untouched. The translator did not feel that there was anything to be improved.

A number of lay people of a Nuremburg congregation enacted the play, and up to date there have been five performances, four of them in Nuremburg only. Students of the University of Erlangen are preparing a performance to take place in autumn, and the Y.M.C.A. at Regensburg plans too to perform it. It is quite likely that other groups in Northern Germany take it up also.

The performance in Nuremburg took place in overcrowded congregation halls, and pastors of congregations in the vicinity have asked the group to visit their congregations in autumn. It is estimated that there may be about ten more performances by this group. The actors make a real sacrifice of their time, most of them being elderly people or students, but they like the play and know that they are serving the Church in an effective way.

Before the first performance there were people who were pessimistic. The play is too long, they argued, our people are chased and nervous, one cannot expect them to sit and listen for more than two hours. What happened was that in each performance, after having listened for about two and a half hours, people expressed their regret that the performance was already over. Time passes unnoticed during the performance—an experience which baffled experts of so-called "Laienspiele".

In every case the audience was deeply impressed. In one case people were sitting quietly at the end for more than one minute before they stirred and silently went home. Some of the comments were: "Sue Spanner—that's what we should be", "They are right—we must do more for mission-work", "Those who feel hit by that play are those who deserve it", "Hereafter I shall double my monthly mission contribution", "It causes anxiety, but also shows a way out of it".

It has been found to be a play to catch the attention of educated people and village folks likewise. There are very few sermons moving the audience as this play does. Pastors who study it well get inspirations for sermons. It presents our old gospel in new tongues. Any Christian coming to know it should feel encouraged to do a bit of creative thinking, speaking, and acting, and should be grateful that Miss Joyce Biddell takes courageously a lead in it.

W. HELLINGER, *Leipzig Evang.-Luth. Mission.*

Brighouse. *The Huddersfield Daily Examiner writes:*

The first performance of the Methodist Conference Play, a production of Norman Nicholson's *The Old Man of the Mountains*, was given at the Bethel Methodist Church, Brighouse.

In this play Norman Nicholson re-tells the story of Elijah. The author is a Cumberland poet, and the fells of his native county provide the setting, Elijah becomes a shepherd, Ahab the village squire, and all the details of the familiar story are made topical and modern. Elijah is made, in part, a critic of modern methods of land cultivation, methods that in other lands have turned the prairie into a dust-bowl, but the outline of the Biblical narrative is neither lost nor obscured, and the total effect is one of moving simplicity.

The Huddersfield Methodists who have undertaken this play have shown both courage and imagination. The small stage at Brighouse rather hampered them, but the setting by L. Parr is admirable in itself and well suited to the needs of an itinerant production. The playing is marked by a deep sincerity that overcomes some technical deficiencies. The play was produced by Morwenna Bielby.

ALL THE REST

Birmingham.

The Educational Drama Association conducted a one-day conference on Drama and Religion, dealing with problems of Religion in School life and Club work, and the place of Drama in Religious Education generally, with excerpts from *The Man Born to be King* given by the Hall Green Fellowship and Phoenix Players.

Swanwick. *The Rev. Robert Duce writes:*

The Congregational Union of Churches of England and Wales held its first *Forum* at Swanwick in late July under the title of "Freedom and Fellowship in Christ". Provision was given in the Conference for the Union Drama Panel to illustrate new forms of Religious Drama, and under the Rev Robert Duce, General Secretary of the Panel, a lecture-demonstration was given with extracts from Jessie Powell's *The Fare to Tarshish,* and a scene rehearsed from Foder's *The Vigil,* while Mime and Movement found a place with sixty members of the Forum building up a simple crowd scene against music by Handel. The Forum of three hundred Church members and ministers were very impressed with the opportunities open to them in religious drama.

Dudley, Northumberland. *St. Paul's Church. Mr A. Bartley writes:*

In the church hall during Holy Week, the St Paul's Players presented *Mary of Magdala,* a play by Ernest Milton.

Capacity audiences paid tribute to author and players alike, by the tense silence in which they followed the unfolding of this excellent drama, especially when you realize that the seats in the auditorium are hard, and not designed for prolonged comfort.

> The play set in the house of Quintus, Mary's lover, portrays the spoilt and pampered beauty in all her moods and whims, thirsting for new experiences, evidently seeking for happiness and unable to find it in the flesh pots of materialism.
>
> Driven by a force of which she is afraid, Mary, persuaded by Elkan, visits the house of Simon, there to meet Christ.

The impact of our Lord and His crucifixion, on Quintus and his household and friends, is vividly presented.

The anguished uncertainty in the mind of Mary of Magdala, the resentment of Quintus at the change wrought by "this disturbing young man", Quintus trying to apply his materialistic mind to the events which have passed, and unable to find a solution, his inability to understand why the keeping of "all the religious, moral, and civic laws" were not enough, that love of Jesus came through forgiveness, are all clearly presented.

The sound logic of the arguments of Quintus on the one hand, opposed to the eloquent and equally sound arguments of Othmar and Bodmin, were followed with rapt attention by the audience.

The realization by Mary, of the victory of Christ, over the forces of evil following her visit to the tomb, and the appearance to her of her beloved Lord and Master, culminates in what must be the great truth of the Christian doctrine "service is perfect freedom", when in the last few moments of the play she exclaims "I am free now, I am free to worship my Christ".

A truly wonderful experience for players and audience alike.

Also a very sincere thank you to the author, Ernest Milton, for a really excellent play.

Sheffield.

The Holy Family, by R. H. Ward, produced by Pamela Keily at The Central Library Theatre, Sheffield, July 14th, 15th, 1950.

A moving picture far from the jar of the Movie yet nearer to earth and reality as the star is nearer to the byre than the Star to mankind. It was as if Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua had come to life and the Book of Common Prayer had begun to speak with tongues, with vision without revision. The same strength, austerity and simplicity, the only fitting attributes of the Drama of the Universe, were present. But the philosophy of both the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries was static, that of the twentieth is dynamic, so now form must move or be distorted, colour must blend by constant change and the whole must speak to the whole growing man.

"No room, no room" burns into the mind, the heart with shame seeks to share the agony of the arms outstretched, the final triangle of praise uplifts the being and stirs the will in one. Drama, yes; theatre, no. Wise men follow the star and do not notice the Stars. Colour, movement, speech, "out of three sounds he made not a fourth sound but a star". Dramatist, producer and artistes all point in one direction, the rest of us follow limping.

M.H.

Belfast.

"A PAGEANT OF THE HOLY BIBLE"

This Pageant, to be performed in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, by the Religious Drama Society (Down and Dromore, and Connor) during week commencing 14th May, 1951, has been written by Rev. Canon F. J. Mitchell, Rector of Ballymena, and will be produced by a member of the Society. The object of the Pageant will be to show how the Sacred Writings have played a vital part in the history of the British people and are still being translated into many languages and dialects to spread the Kingdom of God's Truth in all the inhabited world.

Bristol. *The Guild of Cathedral Players report:*

Each year in the history of the Guild has brought new evidence of its continued vitality, and the past year has been no exception. We have contended with the old recurring problems of finding replacements for the players who have gone into the Services, and of maintaining the high standard of the Guild's productions. New problems have confronted us, and even where these have not been solved entirely to our satisfaction, they have at least not proved insuperable obstacles.

At last year's Annual General Meeting, it was proposed that *The Pilgrim's Progress* should be the Guild's next play. Its production proved extremely arduous at times. Where so large a cast was involved, and employing many scenes, apparently disjointed in their sequence, it was essential that a high degree of team-work should be achieved.

During the past twelve months, the Guild has undertaken an entirely new venture. A small group of players, under the leadership of Mrs Hullcoop, prepared a small Passion Play, called *In Three Days*. It required but a few costumes and a minimum of chairs and tables for its presentation. It was hoped that we might take the play about to various churches in the diocese. Rehearsals took place during February and March. The Dean and Chapter very kindly gave their support to the idea, and we were thus able to use the name of the Guild. During the week before the production of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and in the week that followed, this Passion Play was presented in nine churches and at the Blind Asylum Workshops. In most cases the play was acted in the church itself with no scenery or special lighting. Everywhere this simple but clear Passion message was received in an atmosphere of worship. We have received several letters from the rectors or vicars thanking us, and asking that we might visit them again. We hope this new aspect of our work will continue, as it does bring the Christian message to many who might otherwise miss those aspects of it which drama can so poignantly bring out.

Cambridge.

On 9th and 10th August Westcott House, Cambridge, performed their annual play in the court, which provides an admirable setting for the drama. It was entitled *The Garden of Decision*. Its theme was the problem of decision which is constantly facing men and women, and this was made alive by presenting the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday, when the problem of decision faced Our Lord and His disciples in its most crucial form.

The Author writes:

The House always presents a play during the Long Vacation Term. It is not always a religious play. For instance last year we chose *Androcles and the Lion*. But it was decided to do a religious one this year, and the production and choice was again left to me. I read a number of suggested works but they seemed mostly to be unsatisfactory in one way or another—unsuitable from casting possibilities or for the lay-out of our garden. The question of how best to use the garden first got me thinking of the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. It seemed an ambitious idea but I was encouraged to persist in working out the scheme I had in mind. Eventually a first draft emerged, which was read to a selection committee and accepted in principle, with the recommendation for a re-shaping of the second Act. This was completed during the June/July Vacation, and so the play went into its fortnight of rehearsal at the end of July.

We were lucky enough to have two evenings of brilliant sunshine for the performances, which came as the crown to what had been a fortnight of hectic but very enjoyable preparation. I think that everyone in the cast felt that there was something real in the play, not only for the audience but also for themselves. Certainly none of us in Westcott House doubt the great value of *good* religious drama as a method of bringing home things that may grow cold, if presented in argument and discussion or a sermon. And the girls in the cast, who of course came from outside the immediate atmosphere of the House, seemed equally to feel that the venture was interesting and worthwhile.

Certainly the play gave rise to a great deal of discussion in and out of the House. It was suggested by one member of the cast that there was lacking in the play a necessary emphasis on the fact of God's infinite love being active over and around the decisions both right and wrong, which we may take, not least in those situations where the wrong one is taken, perhaps even consciously through the weight of circumstances beyond our control. Is it enough to say "God has a will, which may be known and trusted", even if that will is constantly referred to by those who thought they found and followed it, and then discovered they had been mistaken? Is there not a deeper and still more sustaining aspect of God's love?

At any rate, the audience seem to have found in the play enjoyment and food for thought, which is what it aimed to give, for all its many shortcomings. And it was a varied gathering, Senior members of the University, mostly of great

distinction, undergraduates and other friends of the cast, old people from the Infirmary, nurses from the hospital and many friends from all walks of life in the town. And an example of the play's effects may be seen in that two of the guests, the Ely Professor of Divinity and the Chaplain of Trinity sat up until the early hours discussing with the Staff of Westcott House the problems of Decision.

SIMON PHIPPS

Durham.

Further reports have been received from the Durham County Fellowship of Religion, which has recently given performances of *The Figure On The Cross* by R. H. Ward to widely varied audiences.

These reports show that the play appears to have made a deep impression and to have been on the whole clearly understood in spite of the difficulties of its language and the unconventional form of the play, wherever it has been seen.

Calling London R.D. Groups !

The R.D.S. Office from time to time receives enquiries from Londoners wishing to work with a keen local R.D. Group. A particular case is a young man from the Enfield district. Will interested Secretaries kindly contact the office by letter, or telephone WHItehall 8517, Ext. 12?

R. D. S. NOTES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

All members are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of members of the Society which is called for **FRIDAY, 17th November, 1950, at 2.45 p.m. in the WATERGATE THEATRE,** Buckingham Street, London, W.C.2. (Buckingham Street is the second turning on the right past Charing Cross Station going up the Strand from Trafalgar Square.)

Tea will be available at a small charge after the meeting. At about 5 p.m. a group of players from St Mark's Church, South Norwood, under the direction of the Rev. Douglas Remington, will present *The House by the Stable* by Charles Williams. The performance will last about half-an-hour, and will be an example of what an inexperienced parish group can do when well produced. (*The play is produced by arrangement with Ruth Spalding of the Rock Theatre Company Ltd.*)

This is the only intimation members will receive of the meeting, so please note the time and place now, and help to make it a fully representative occasion. We really want to see you!—and we will try to give you an outline of what is being done in the Religious Drama field now, and our great hope for the future.

The Business of the meeting, at which Miss Athene Seyler hopes to preside is:

1. To read the minutes of the last General Meeting.
2. To elect Councillors.
3. To receive short reports of the Society's activities and prospects from the Chairman of the Executive Committee, the Travelling Adviser, and the Acting Secretary, followed by general discussion.

Three representatives from different parts of the country will give a review of the Religious Drama activities in their regions.

Under the revised Constitution one quarter of the Council retire each year according to seniority in office, but a retiring Councillor is eligible for re-election. Members of the Society who wish to propose names of other members for election to the Council are reminded that full notice in writing must be given to the

Secretary at least seven days before the General Meeting. Notice of all other business which members wish to bring forward must be given in writing at the office of the Society at least ten days before the meeting.

COUNCIL MEETING

A meeting of the Council of the Society, including newly elected members, will be held immediately after the performance of the play (at about 5.30 p.m.) also in the Watergate Theatre.

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES' CONFERENCES

The Travelling Adviser's Annual Conference of Regional Representatives, for which invitations have been sent out, will be held on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning, the 16th and 17th November, at S.P.C.K. House.

Miss Robins will be in Yorkshire for the months of September and October, producing *The Zeal of Thy House* for the Y.M.C.A., Yorkshire. The performances will take place in Huddersfield Temperance Hall, from Monday, October 23rd to Saturday, October 28th, nightly.

SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL 1951

In May and June 1951 the Provost and Chapter of Southwark Cathedral are presenting *Your Trumpets, Angels,* a verse play specially written for the Cathedral. The script is by K. M. Baxter, the music composed by Christopher le Fleming and the production in the hands of Doreen Woodcock. The undertaking is a very large one and financial resources are slender.

The Producer is open to receive offers of help from any and every reliable source. These offers will be welcomed in any of the following categories: Stage management, wardrobe, publicity, secretarial work, singing, dancing, acting or finance. Full information can be obtained from R.D.S. Office and direct offers of help should be made by letter to

Miss Woodcock,
c/o R.D.S.
S.P.C.K. House,
Northumberland Avenue,
W.C.2.

LIBRARY

New Plays.

**And it Came to Pass.* VICTOR ANDREWS. 1950. (Faith Press, 1/-.) X.H. 35 mins. 10 m., 1 w., Narrator, angel. Originally written for production in All Saints' Cathedral, Cairo. (No fee.)

A Goodly Heritage. Pageant Play. G. EVELYN HART. Illustrated by Winifred Schofield. H. Written for the 21st Anniversary of the South Wilts. Grammar School.

**Holy Family.* R. H. WARD. New edition, revised. X.H. Chorus of twelve, 9 m., 3 w., (variable). 1¼ hours. No scenery; stage may be dispensed with. Dramatic verse. Specially suitable for Christmas. New preface by the author. (Fee; apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

Militant and Triumphant. A Pageant of the Church. JOHN and SHEILA GIBBS. 1950. (M.Y.D., 2/6.) H. Nine Episodes with varying casts. "An attempt to present the majesty and relevance of the Church in a manner intelligible to a generation to whom the Church means very little." (Fee 5/-; 2/6 for single episode.)

**Old Testament Plays.* LAURENCE HOUSMAN. 1950. (Cape, 9/6). Containing:

"Abraham and Isaac": "Jacob's Ladder": "Ramoth Gilead": "Burden of Ninevah": "Samuel the Kingmaker".

Re-issue under a new title of all the author's plays based on Old Testament history. (Fees: apply Publishers.)

**Six London Plays.* VERA I. ARLETT and H. F. RUBENSTEIN. 1950. (Gollancz, 7/6.)

Hamlet in Aldwych (See C.D. No. VIII).

Poets and Peasants. (William Langland.) H. 1 act. 40 mins. 5 m., 2 w.

Incident in a Fire. (Samuel Pepys). H. 1 act. 40 mins. 5 m., 3 w.

Blake's Comforter. H. 1 act. 40 mins. 2 m., 1 g.

Words by Mr Gilbert (W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan). H. 1 act. 40 mins. 2 m., 3 w., 1 g., 1 b.

Post War. H. 1 act. 30 mins. 3 m., 2 w.

Fees: apply S. French (excepting *Hamlet in Aldwych*).

These plays all have a Christian application at their hearts. They are not obviously "Religious Drama", but will give the audience something to take away and are recommended to those who want to do their work in a quasi-secular manner.

* Recommended

Set.

The Acts of St Peter. GORDON BOTTOMLEY.

Reference Library.

The Divine Comedy. I. Hell. Translated from Dante by Dorothy L. Sayers. 1949. (Penguin, 2/6.)

Four Quartets. HELEN GARDNER. A commentary on T. S. Eliot's "Quartets". In the Penguin New Writing. No. 29.

Mime in Class and Theatre. J. G. MARASH. Illustrated by Gwendoline Perkins and with Photographs by Yeldham Unwin. 1950. (Harrap, 7/6.) Includes valuable chapters on "Bible Story in Mime" and "Mime in the Scripture Lesson."

Oberammergau and its Passion Play. ELISABETHE H. S. CORATHIEL. 1950. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 10/6.) With photographic illustrations of the district, the play and the players.

Poetry and Personal Responsibility. GEORGE EVERY. 1950. (S.C.M. Press. Viewpoints, 2/6). An Interim Report on Contemporary Literature.

CHRISTIAN DRAMA is the quarterly magazine of the RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY. *President*: The Lord Bishop of Chichester. *Chairman of Executive*: E. Martin Browne. *Chairman of Council*: Miss Athene Seyler. *Travelling Adviser*: Miss Carina Robins. *Librarian*: Miss K. Bainbridge-Bell. All enquiries and applications for membership should be addressed to The Secretary, R.D.S., S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, W.C.2

Published for the Religious Drama Society by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, and printed in Great Britain by The Talbot Press (S·P·C·K), Saffron Walden, Essex.